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A Lenten Reflection from the Conference Minister: “Phone Calls”

by Rev. Kim Wood, Conference Minister

The very first step in nonviolence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness.

The Gospel of Non-violence by Mahatma Gandhi

I will never forget the call from my dad telling me that my cousin, Liane, had been murdered.

Liane was 24 years old, thriving in her chosen career, happy in a new, positive relationship, and was being stalked by her ex-boyfriend. Not just being followed and called but threatened and terrorized. Numerous calls to the police were met with the response that they could not arrest him until he actually “did” something (over the years, stalking laws have been added or revised to allow law enforcement to intervene differently, but the limitations are still very real). She finally was able to get an order of protection a week before death. But in the end, it didn’t matter. He followed her to her boyfriend’s home, which she was watching while he was away on business, broke in, and he fatally shot her with a sawed-off shotgun.



I will never forget waiting for the call to hear that he had been arrested. Those were terrifying hours when police guarded her parents, younger sisters, and grandmother, my great-aunt in their home in Indiana because there was fear that he would come to do them harm next. I remember worrying about my own grandmother and if he would come looking for her. And I remember receiving the news that he had been apprehended.

I will never forget hearing the 911 call they played over and over on the news, the terror in her voice as she reported that he was there, the blast of the gun at the end. And then she was gone.

Liane's stalker was a dangerous person. He had repeatedly shown that he was possessive, violent, and controlling. And he had guns.

According to the Center for American Progress in an article written by Marissa Edmund, "Every month, an average of 57 women are killed with a firearm by an intimate partner." Edmund also reported, "The impact of gun violence against women goes beyond fatal encounters. A 2016 study found that nearly 1 million women alive at the time had been shot by an intimate partner, and 4.5 million women had been threatened with a firearm." (Jan. 2022)

I will never forget those phone calls. They are phone calls that should never have to be made or received, because they are acts that should never occur. And yet, they, the menacing realities and violent acts, continue without ceasing. And they will go on unless we initiate change.

Gandhi's premise that we must first cultivate the framework of non-violence in our daily lives is not foreign to us. In fact, as Jesus followers, we claim it as our very foundation. Jesus walked the talk of non-violence and calls us to do the same. I don't know why Liane's murderer was compelled to order his life with threats and violence to the point of taking the life of someone he supposedly loved. But I do know that we can change the ethos and develop a new narrative that is one of truthfulness, humility, tolerance, and loving kindness, with God's guidance and help. I pray that we may do this work together, and that the phone calls of pain and fear and murder may diminish and, one day soon, cease.

Dear God, give us the courage to make real change, the fortitude to dissolve the strands of anger and violence that bind us and hold us back from loving one another as you have first loved us, and the wisdom to embrace the way of Christ that to which you have called us. Amen.

News from the Conference Office

New Board Leadership

At its February 9th meeting, the Southeast Conference Board of Directors appointed a new Moderator, Vice-Moderator, and Nominating Committee Chairperson.

Rev. Richard Barham will serve as moderator of the Southeast Conference for the remainder of the 2022-2024 term. Moderator Barham is Senior Pastor of Spirit of the Cross Church, UCC in Huntsville, Alabama. He has served on the Board of Directors as the Chairperson of the Nominating Committee since 2020. He also works with the Commission on Ministry's Church Team.

Rev. LaVerne Dixon has been appointed as the vice-moderator of the Southeast Conference for the remainder of the 2022-24 term. Vice-Moderator Dixon serves as the Outreach Minister at First Congregational Church, UCC in Atlanta, GA. She is new to the SECUCC Board. We are looking forward to her voice at the table and her leadership as part of the Executive Committee.

Ms. Juanita Simmons has been appointed to the Southeast Conference Board of Directors as Chairperson of the Nominating Committee. Chairperson Simmons served on the SECUCC Board of Directors from 2017-2021 as the Stewardship and Finance Committee Chair. She has been a member of the Nominating Committee since 2022.

We are grateful for Rev. Barham's, Rev Dixon's, and Ms. Simmons' willingness to serve in these new leadership roles. We also want to thank **Ms. Ugena Whitlock**, who has been the Conference Moderator since 2020, and **Rev. Dr. Myrtle Johnson**, who has served for that same period as Vice-Moderator, and most recently as acting moderator during a leave of absence by the moderator. We have been blessed by their leadership. We offer our prayers and support as they move off in different directions.

Southeast Conference Board of Directors Votes to Join Amicus Brief

On February 15, 2023, the Southeast Conference Board of Directors voted for the Southeast Conference to join an amicus brief initiated by the National Council of Jewish Women in support of a lawsuit that has been filed against the State of Georgia regarding Georgia House Bill 481, which is the state's ban of abortion.

The amicus brief is specifically about lack of consideration for the diversity of religious beliefs and voices in Georgia and the utilization of one religious view as justification and support for the ban. As stated in the brief: *House Bill 481 (H.B. 481 or the LIFE Act) simultaneously disregards and threatens Georgia's religious diversity by codifying into law one religious view about when life begins and whether and when the decision to terminate a pregnancy can morally be made.*

The motion voted upon by the Board was that the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ join the amicus brief as written which argues HB 481 violates the religious liberties guaranteed to Georgians under the federal and state constitutions. The amicus brief has been filed with the Supreme Court of Fulton County, Georgia. We will keep you apprised of the case as we receive information.

Please pray for each person involved in making decisions regarding this Georgia House Bill 481. May God provide wisdom and encourage compassionate discernment as they examine both the bill and the concerns it raises. Please pray for the people who would be impacted by this and other such legislation. And please pray for all of us that, even with differing views and beliefs, we will strive to listen to and care for one another.

From our Generosity Coordinator

by Min. Carrole Moss

Pray that this season of Lent is healing, restoring, and renewing our minds, bodies, and spirits! So much to focus on, to challenge us, and to promote our healing. This may be a new concept for some, but it promotes healing and restoration!

Our UCC focus this month is One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) which is usually celebrated on the fourth Sunday of Lent. The United Church of Christ responds to humanitarian needs in the world. These gifts carry God's message of Love and hope to people in crisis. This offering provides sources of clean water, food, education, health care, small business micro-credit loans, advocacy, resettlement for refugees and displaced persons, emergency relief and rehabilitation.



When we think of initiatives that we need to respond to..THIS IS ONE! We continue to appreciate all the ways you support The United Church of Christ in ALL of our endeavors!! Donating to this initiative also helps you to become a "5 For 5" Church!

I am looking forward to working with all of you In 2023! Blessings as we continue to JOURNEY..TOGETHER...

Life in the Southern Region of the UCC

a guest article by Rev. John Vertigan, Conference Minister, Florida Conference

Here's a random thought that won't leave me alone today as I am called to write for Celebrate Florida. In just a few weeks, I will enjoy a brief vacation with loved ones in Hawaii. I'm looking forward to it as it follows upon a January filled with an abundance of medical appointments that included cataract surgery and other procedures (it's not easy getting old).

Here's the random thought: It was 130 years ago that US troops entered Hawaii and toppled the Hawaiian kingdom and annexed the islands as US property. It was thirty years ago that President Bill Clinton apologized for that action. Today, there are Hawaiians arguing that the illegally annexed islands should be returned to the native Hawaiian people. While that's not likely to happen, I am struck by the fact that I will soon be enjoying the fruits of that annexation even while others are struggling to reclaim their cultural identity that was usurped so many years ago.



This thought comes on the heels of a recent trip to a Florida State Park and the visitors center there that offered a history of the area. Among the archeological finds dating back to when the Timucua inhabited the lands was written text describing how the land came into American hands 'after struggles with the Indians'. Talk about an understatement. The description offered nothing by way of telling visitors about the genocide of native peoples that took place in Florida and across the North American continent during that period called 'manifest destiny' that we teach in grade school to children yet too innocent to discern between truth and untruth, fact and spin.

I enjoyed my time at the state park even though I know something of what happened there centuries ago. I will enjoy my time in Hawaii though I know something of what happened there 130 years ago. But, in both instances, my enjoyment will be tempered by my awareness of the European colonization that destroyed so much of indigenous culture and the American colonization that reached far beyond the north American west coast and subdued an entire island culture in an unnecessary attempt to Christianize native peoples while plundering their land in the name of capitalism.

Here's another random thought that won't leave me alone today: how do we repent and make reparations for the harm done and the privilege gained and granted by actions that took place long ago? I offer that question for future discussion. Be at peace, and be in touch, won't you.

Not Too Late for Yearbook Reporting

It's not too late!!!! You can still use our Google form to report Yearbook numbers for this year. Complete your yearbook form here:

<https://forms.gle/ACwQ2fK8pkhorjM98>

Installation of Rev. Laura Robinson at Peace Church in Clemson

The Commission on Ministry and Peace Church invite you to the installation of Rev. Laura Robinson as pastor of Peace Church in Clemson on April 30, 2023 at 5pm at Peace Church. You are invited to join onsite or online ([you can join online here](#)). If you are going to participate onsite, please RSVP to pastor@thepeacechurch.org. Ministers are invited to wear red stoles for the installation.

Laura Robinson comes from Seattle, WA and was born and raised in the United Church of Christ. She has a M.Div from Candler School of Theology and was ordained in 2018. She's served churches in Des Moines, IA and White Salmon, WA, and began her current pastorate at [Peace Church](#) in Clemson, SC in August 2021. She also serves as the Coordinating Director of [Frontline Faith](#) (the UCC's online learning platform) for Convergence. She's passionate about nurturing an embodied faith that leads toward collective healing and liberation for all of creation.



Laura is a queer, cis-woman living in Greenville, SC with her partner Noah, their housemate Oliver, and a dynamic dog and cat duo, Georgie and Odin. She dreams of growing at least some of her own food, making friends with the trees in her neighborhood, and writing her own book someday.



Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2023. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of March 5

- Rehoboth Fellowship; Atlanta, Georgia
- UCC National Staff
- Valerie Coe Lowder
- Kriss (Mi Young) Choi
- Timothy Garvin-Leighton
- James Janecek

Week of March 12

- First Congregational UCC; Atlanta, Georgia
- Common Global Ministries and all mission personnel
- Thomas Baird
- Robert Eaddy
- Cheryl Slusser

Churches in Transition

First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Holy Trinity Community Church, Nashville TN; First United Church, Belvidere TN; Deer Lodge Congregational Church, Deer Lodge TN; Brookemeade Congregational, Nashville TN; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA; Sandy Creek, Lafayette AL; First Congregational Christian, Montgomery AL; Open Table UCC, Mobile AL; Unity UCC, Montgomery, AL; Safe Harbor Family

Church, Clinton MS

News from the Wider Church

Making GOOD TROUBLE

on the Mississippi Gulf Coast for 100 Years...
Conference & Festivities



RESCHEDULED!

Due to overwhelming feedback, the Making Trouble Conference has been rescheduled for May 4-7, 2023! We will be having the same exciting speakers and workshop leaders as previously planned. We will also have blocks of hotel rooms available for those needing accommodations. Scholarships are available!

Registration is OPEN.

For more information please contact: Laura
LPayne@thebackbaymission.org or Kevin
Kkotula@thebackbaymission.org or 228-432-0301

May 4 - 7, 2023

Still in Biloxi on the scenic Mississippi Gulf Coast!

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Rev. John Dorhauer

United Church of Christ
General Minister and President



CLOSING SPEAKER

Katherine Eglund

Director EEECHO (Education,
Economics, Environmental,
Climate and Health
Organization)



BREAKOUT SESSION SPEAKERS

Renee Collini

Regional Coastal Climate
Resilience Specialist,
Mississippi State University



Rev. Phil Hodson

South Central
Conference Minister
United Church of Christ



Rev. James Pennington

Back Bay Mission,
Executive Director



LUNCH SPEAKER

Lauren Turner

Owner & Chef,
of Makin.Groceries



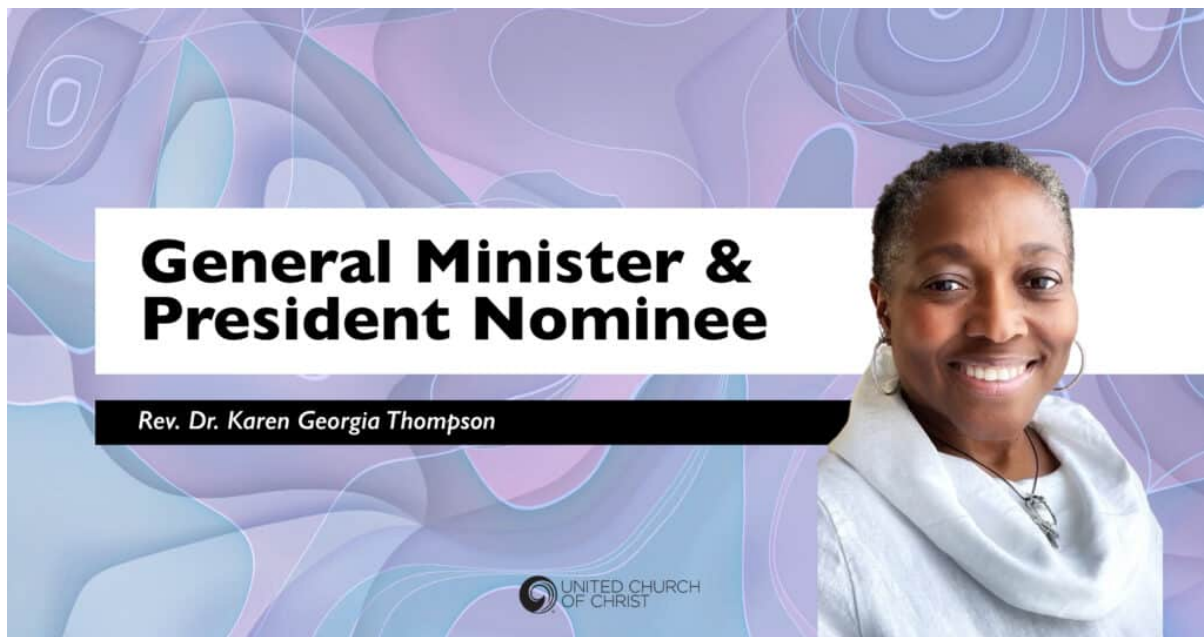
Come Celebrate Back Bay Mission's 100 Year Anniversary!

by Mary Ruth

Join us on the beautiful Mississippi Gulf Coast May 4-7, 2023, for Back Bay Mission's "Makin' Good Trouble" Conference!! This is a great way to participate in our celebration of Back Bay Mission, our 100 years of service,

and our deep history & connection with the United Church of Christ. Our conference is a one-of-a-kind, 4-day immersive experience designed to put you in the heart of Back Bay Mission to learn the where, what, why and how we've been able to make good trouble for 100 years! Featuring our keynote speaker Rev. John Dorhauer, UCC General Minister & President, and conference will conclude with the first UCC church service on the Mississippi Gulf Coast since 1976!! (Almost 50 years!!)

[CLICK HERE to purchase your tickets to join us at the "Making Good Trouble Conference" 2023!](#)



UCC Search Committee recommends Karen Georgia Thompson as next leader

After a year-long search, the United Church of Christ Board's Search Committee for General Minister and President has made a historic choice. The committee will be recommending Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson to the UCCB this week as nominee for General Minister and President. If elected, she would be the first woman, and the first woman of African descent, to lead the denomination. [Read more.](#)

Trainings, Conferences & Events

**Healthy Boundaries 301: Money, Sex, & Power****April 28, 2023, 1:45 - 5:15 ET (Part 1)****AND April 29, 2023, 8:45 am - 12:15 pm ET (Part 2)****Both sessions required***Register by April 19, 2023*

An advanced discussion of healthy boundaries for clergy and church leaders, designed for those who have completed Healthy Boundaries 101. This workshop builds on the basics and applies boundaries principles to specific situations with a particular emphasis on power dynamics, finances, sexual harassment, and pornography. Register and pay for this workshop [here](#). Please note: Healthy Boundaries 201 and Healthy Boundaries 301 can be taken in any order, as long as the participant has completed Healthy Boundaries 101 or an equivalent foundational workshop.

Upcoming Training from the Ministry Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Team

MESA offers Zoom trainings on topics of interest for Committees on Ministry, judicatory staff, and occasionally clergy who may not be serving on a COM. All trainings require advance registration; a confirmation email will then be sent to registrants with additional information.

[Thursday, March 23, Retired Ministers Boundary Training, with the Rev. Tara Barber and the Rev. Stephen Boyd of the MESA Team](#)

Maintaining healthy boundaries is challenging at any stage in ministry and it is particularly tender and difficult attending to boundaries as we transition out of our last call, and while in retirement. Using "A Sure Foundation", "The Ministerial Code" and Rev. Dr. Bruce Epperly's new book,

"The Jubilee Years", Rev. Stephen Boyd and Rev. Tara Barber will offer a focused Boundary Awareness Training for those entering and living in retirement. NOTE: This training completes individual requirements for boundary training ONLY WHEN authorized by a local Committee on Ministry.

[Wednesday, April 12, Conference/Association Ecumenical Leadership and Responsibilities, 3:30 – 5:00 PM ET with the Rev. Mark Pettis and the Rev. Elizabeth Dilley](#)

Join the Rev. Mark Pettis, the UCC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Manager, and the Rev. Elizabeth Dilley, MESA Team Leader, for a conversation exploring the leadership responsibilities of judicatory leaders in ecumenical contexts. The conversation will include reflections on appropriate steps for welcoming ecumenically ordained ministers serving in UCC contexts, support and accountability for UCC clergy serving in ecumenical contexts, support and accountability for non-UCC clergy serving in UCC contexts, regional ecumenical and interfaith leadership protocols, and navigating search and call for churches with multiple denominational affiliations. This event is open to current judicatory staff, members of Committees on Ministry, and others interested in these topics.



UCC Webinar: Leaky Stoves and Deadly Gases

In the media and social media, gas and electric stoves have recently been a "hot topic." In this webinar, we will seek to put this "heated debate" within its proper ethical context in terms of environmental justice, public health,

and concerns about methane pollution. This webinar will prepare faith communities for informed action in caring for our neighbors and our planet. Even if you cannot make the webinar at its scheduled time on March 8, 2023 at 1:00 pm ET, still sign-up, and we will send you a link to a recording of it. [Register now!](#)

Conference Calendar

March 7 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EST

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

March 9 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EST

[Board of Directors Meeting](#)

March 14 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

March 16 @ 1:00 pm - 1:30 pm EDT

[Live Harp Meditations for Ministers](#)

March 16 @ 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm EDT

[Commission on Ministry Meeting](#)

March 21 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

March 28 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EDT

[Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers](#)

March 28 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

View the full calendar of events online: <https://www.secucc.org/events/>

Contact Us

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Assoc. Conf. Minister: **Rev. Heather Fosburgh**; hfosburgh@secucc.org

Generosity Coordinator: **Min. Carrole Moss**; cmoss@secucc.org

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